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Matthew Arnold on continental life and literature

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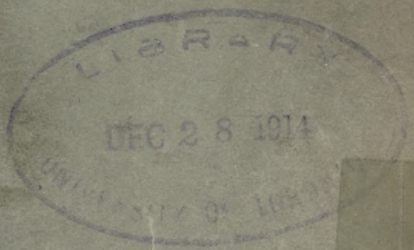
The Matthew Arnold Memorial Prize Essay, 1913

BY

ALEXANDER P. KELSO, B.A., B.Sc.

SOMETIME RHODES SCHOLAR AT WORCESTER COLLEGE
OXFORD



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MATTHEW ARNOLD ON CONTINENTAL LIFE AND LITERATURE

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Matthew Arnold
on
Continental Life and Literature

THE MATTHEW ARNOLD MEMORIAL PRIZE ESSAY

1913

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PREFACE

It seems like the irony of fate that Matthew Arnold should have to suffer his views of the Continent to be presented by an American, when we remember his criticisms of America and things American—criticisms, less virulent, but no more complimentary than those of Dickens or that *enfant terrible*, Kipling. But Dr. Warren's statement, in his essay on Arnold, that so far we only have a series of snapshots of that fascinating figure, has encouraged me in believing that the publishing of this study is not entirely needless. It puts us in possession of what the modern German seems to believe to be the basis of all true understanding—the *Quellen*.

I must express my thanks here for the aid which the President of Magdalen gave me in pointing out certain omissions in the essay as originally written.

The references are to the complete edition of 1904.

A. P. Kelso.

828 Ridge Avenue,
Allegheny, Pennsylvania.
Jan., 1914.

CONTENTS

		PAGE.
I.	Introduction - - - - - - -	1
II.	Why Matthew Arnold Revised his Judgment of France - - - - - -	6
III.	Germany—The Triumph of System - -	25
IV.	The Italians - - - - - - -	41
V.	Conclusion - - - - - - -	50

MATTHEW ARNOLD

ON

CONTINENTAL LIFE AND LITERATURE

I.—Introduction.

Matthew Arnold was, by the grace of God, a critic. As a critic, he combined two different and, at first glance, discordant rôles. With the instincts of a Hebrew prophet, he was by the compulsion of circumstance an English schoolmaster, although of a higher order. The irony of the situation lies in the fact that he had no great respect for either of these parts. Forced from a life of purely literary workmanship, he was compelled to view literature and life not as products whose origin might be ignored, but as products whose value lay largely in the source from which they came. Not men as they are, but their education, not character as it is, but its creation, is the phase of life which a school inspector is bound to consider. Pushed out of the main stream he had the advantage of a freer estimate of the tendency of modern English life than would have been possible if he had been caught in the rush of politics, religion, or so-called society. But with this there was bound to come a

slight loss of perspective; the outlines of Salem Chapel and the Classical, Commercial Academy dominate his horizon, and do not dominate English life. He was saved from the devitalizing influence of a complete absorption in educational problems by his Hebraic temperament. Professor Saintsbury's hesitating suggestion of a Semitic tinge in the Arnolds is hardly required to make us note it; the thoroughly un-Hellenic passion with which Matthew Arnold proclaimed his gospel of culture is exactly what we would have expected in a Jew who had deserted the disquisitions of the Synagogue for those of the Porch and the Academy. It is unnecessary to try and trace this temperament by a genealogy of the Arnold family; for the Hebraic spirit was to be found—only too plentifully Arnold himself thought—in English literature; and Matthew Arnold had drunk deeply from that source. Just as his vehemently cordial admiration of the Continent, his apparent disparagement of ways English are but further proofs of how genuine an Englishman he was; so his advocacy of Continental Hellenism would only have been possible for a thinker with a firm grasp on the peculiarly Hebraic philosophy of the English. Like all converts he tended to minimise the past, though he was not ready to discard it entirely.

We find him dissociating himself from the attitude of the average young aristocrat, who returns from his travels on the continent with an ardent admiration for the firm dealing with the multitude which prevails there, but who 'manages completely to miss the

grounds of reason and intelligence, which alone can give any colour of justification ' to the methods; for such an admiration must be followed by a complete relinquishment of the superstition that an Englishman has the inalienable right of doing what he likes.[1] It is just as irrational as the more common attitude of the tourists, whose one expression is, ever on their lips as they journey from Calais to Constantinople: Foreigners don't wash.[2] It is not then as a barbarian, who by accident has strayed to the seats of civilization, and who sends back reports to his fellows, that Matthew Arnold would have us take him, but as a thinker who has felt the mystery of the fact that our neighbours differ from us in manners and viewpoint, and who finds in their experiences a possible solution of the vexing problems of society in England—political, religious, literary. His belief is, in short, that a mending of the great social schism of Greek and Hebrew, Churchman and Nonconformist, will never be attained by allowing the two parties to fight it out; for they are fortified in the prejudices they have inherited from the past, and are only agreed on a senseless worship of things English. But bring English life into the main stream of European life, and the moderation that will result will bind the nation into a true whole.

He was, then, a cosmopolitan in the sense that he could accept the foreigner and his peculiarities with equanimity; he was not a cosmopolitan to the extent of expatriating himself and firing long-distance shots

[1] VI. 61. [2] VI. 380.

at the British public from the security of the Grand Canal. Hence his criticism of England was not a Byronic tirade. Its value lay not merely in the fact that he kept in touch with English life, not merely that he could at times bring his lessons very much into touch with questions at home, nor, largely, that he could at times descend into details, even the driest educational statistics—but much rather because he kept himself free from that exaggerated worship of the Continent which was to be found in the other great English critic, Carlyle. And here it was that the enforced life of schoolmastering, with, in his case, its slightly pedantic vein, kept him sane and sober. There always stood before him the memory of that interesting handful of Athenians, and forbade him falling down and worshipping, for instance, Goethe.

While this dual parentage gave him an admirable balance, we shall find that it caused puzzling and inconsistent elements in his judgment on the life and literatures of the three great Continental countries; and it is to this same double tendency that we attribute the division of interests in his work. It is not with literature and education alone that he deals; religion and politics also receive a certain emphasis. Even if it is admitted that, as a school inspector, he seemed to give literature too predominant a place among the arts—the few touches on Italian painting and the complete silence on music may be sufficient proof of this—and even if education for him tends to be considered as a training of future writers and

readers of literature, a view which he maintained was superior to the Huxleian superstition in the potency of chemical and biological formulae for training the mind—for is not literature superior to science, since, as the greater, it includes it?—in spite of all this obtrusive narrowness and apparent bigotry, I think we can find a broad, clear ground-tone of thought, which tells us that life is more than literature, and an outlook on the world which we might characterise, if we disregarded his aversion for the term, as truly philosophic.

He stood before the English people with a burden whose leading thought was the same as Hosea's: that his people were being carried captive for a want of knowledge. His whole career, his advocacy of educational reforms, and his scathing attacks on the idols of literary England, all are subservient to his advocacy of the great means of salvation for a people —education. And it is as such, as the prophet of true culture or education, that we should accept him, even if certain of his predictions—notably the impending sterility of English literature, the Americanisation of the people, the eclipse of Nonconformity—were never or, at least, not so immediately fulfilled as he had expected.

Where, then, did he gain this insight into life? I think the study of his acquaintance with the Continent will reveal much towards an answer of that; it is, therefore, as a contribution towards solving that, not as a solution complete in itself, that this study can be viewed.

II.—Why Matthew Arnold revised his Judgment on France.

The voice that first called Matthew Arnold from the fat and somewhat insipid fare of the early Victorian writers was that ' which had filled Europe with the name of George Sand.' There were some people at the time who felt that the simile should have referred to the nostrils rather than to the hearing. Even Arnold admitted that the general English public considered her as writing novels more or less interesting, the earlier ones objectionable, the latter fit to be put into the hands of both sexes.[1]

As early as 1846 he decided to visit George Sand. Consulting Cassini's giant map in the Bodleian, and daring the discomforts of a diligence, he made his pilgrimage to Nohant. He describes his feelings as he was ushered one morning, at breakfast time, into the little court which surrounded George Sand; how he met her children and Chopin. He attempts to defend her attire; but cannot quite forgive her for the cup of that insipid and depressing beverage which she, like all foreigners, imagined that he, an Englishman, must be thirsting for, and which she insisted on his drinking. He gives her, unconsciously enough, a left-hand compliment; it was her simplicity, he says, that was so impressive. Once again, in 1859, he had the opportunity of meeting her, when on his educational commission to France; he had

[1] X. *Mixed Essays*, s.v.

even gone the length of obtaining a letter from Michelet, the Minister of Education, but missed her by delaying, he tells us. But in a letter to his wife, which contains the quotation of de Circourt about the 'fat, old muse,' he admits that what Sainte-Beuve had told him about her made him care less about seeing her.

It was this vision of her in youth that was enough, then, to encourage him to enter the lists as her champion. With more prudence than valour, he admits that he is unable to decide whether or not her books were too numerous, and whether or not they will all live; but contents himself with what sounds very much like heresy in one who held his critical creed—that they had made an impression. He also evades the charge of subjectivism, or unreality, that had been made against her, by saying that she was not a creator of characters—an affirmation that may very well cover deficiencies not only of technique, but of imagination.

It is the spirit of her work which he finds so valuable: like Rousseau, she is an idealist, in the first stage revolting against the world and in agony, in the second having found a peace that passes understanding. This reliance on nature is the true religion; it is not the mystical effluence that she had experienced in her convent days, not the worship of the deity that goes on in churches, nor the sovereign whom men claim to detect in the firmament; it is the love for that unhurried, undisturbed nature, which has taught the French peasant his calm fidelity—lessons

which even the very oxen of France seemed to have learnt. It is this 'Nature eternally young, beautiful, bountiful,' which she had taught the world and Matthew Arnold to adore.

However correct this characterisation of George Sand as a Millet of French literature may be, he is not content with that; she is the great interpreter of equality. Even the young Englishman might be got to admit the value of equality in general; it was only when this equality was interpreted by George Sand to mean social equality that the aristocrat, in Arnold's opinion, would hesitate and go away very sorrowful.

This worship of the lowest class, as far less objectionable than the middle class, is of course nothing really new; the delights and benefits of the country have been recounted by many writers, and apparently with little persuasiveness. Even George Sand was not able to instil her respect for the peasants into all of her disciples. The military reverses of France seemed to them to be due to the peasant; the besotted son of the soil had given them the Emperor, the Emperor had caused the war. The facts seemed against her. But George Sand was, Arnold reminds us, a woman; with the feminine instinct she felt that 'weakness, docility, attractiveness, suavity are here just as real forces as forces of vigour, encroachment, violence, and brutality,'—a lesson that Arnold commends to Prince Bismarck. That she failed to lament the losses of the war is doubtless due to this same feminine logic.

After admitting faults of declaration, faults of repetition, faults of extravagance, Arnold unhesitatingly proclaims his belief that her work will outlive the realistic fiction of France, which deals with the average, sensual Frenchman—a tendency of fiction that has become widespread; the honour, if it is an honour, of being the originator of this tendency is Balzac's, whose chief disciple is Daudet. This hopeful attitude towards her work cannot be supported by the glittering generality that all great writers—Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Molière, Rousseau, and George Sand—have all been governed by the motive of the chorus in Agamemnon—*τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω*; for, if we may dare to cross swords with Matthew Arnold, may not a writer with no ideals whatever have advanced the cause of right further, by his very opposition, than some of its weak and ineffective advocates?

In the canons of literary criticism he has given us we are warned against personal judgments and historical estimates, and are told to test a writing by a real judgment. In regard to George Sand, we can only say that the visit to Nohant and the cup of tea were impressions that not even the judgment of one of the calmest of English critics could have ruled out; and Matthew Arnold was not a dispassionate observer.

To follow the fate of the French novel, we find Matthew Arnold discussing George Sand's view of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert, he thinks, has brought a new note into French literature. It is

not, indeed, lyrical or idealistic. The defence he offers of the book is George Sand's; it holds the mirror up to nature—the provincial French towns are infested with countless Madame Bovaries. But, though a good book in France, it would have been a bad one in England, for there are not many such people in small provincial towns. It is hard to believe in the seriousness of this defence; and yet he seems to be torn between George Sand's dictum and his own literary conscience, for he says that, while no one can deny that the development of the French novel renders life, yet we have the right to rate Sardou and Dumas the younger as low as we will, even to refuse to call them literature.[1] Later, in his essay on Tolstoi, he admits that Madame Bovary is petrified, as compared with Anna Karenina; and in a frank eulogy of Scherer, says that at that time he no longer read French novels or even criticism, except those of the writer in question, with the expectancy and gratification that George Sand and Sainte-Beuve had once awakened.[2]

It was not as an aggregate of French novels that Matthew Arnold conceived French literature; its unique phase was rather its modern development of the critical faculty. His justification of the French Academy and plea for a similar institution in England is based on the fact that, whereas in France literary work has had to meet the examination of a learned and select body, in England misguided appreciation has caused its superabundance of genius

[1] IV. 261 ff. [2] IV. 222.

to be directed into the wrong channels; in short, that it has been wasted. It may be quibbling to suggest that the main channel of English literature is where the bulk of the stream is; but, as a matter of fact, the argument is based on the premiss that the tendency of the literature on the Continent is the dominating one in the civilised world.

However, French criticism, like the French novel, came to Arnold through a very particular source. Sainte-Beuve, Arnold tells us with pardonable pride, has told him that he, Arnold, had entered French literature by a very intimate union—which is, to be interpreted, George Sand and himself. Sainte-Beuve, we read in the essay on Amiel, had confessed to a friend that he ate his heart out, when not up to the neck in work. This literary practitioner, then, was considered the incarnation of the critical spirit in its highest manifestation. It is hard to estimate how far Arnold followed his lead. In *Sweetness and Light*, the *Quarterly Review's* damnation of Sainte-Beuve's work as prompted by mere curiosity is held to be a very inadequate estimate. The plea on which Arnold attempts to ingratiate him with the English public is the fact that he was, if not the first, yet the most influential critic who appreciated the English poets, and who changed the French opinion in regard to Shakespeare and Milton. The *Biographie Universelle* had said as many disparaging things about Shakespeare and Milton as it could; had ridiculed the idea of their being world poets. Sainte-Beuve, however, had changed all that; one

of his school could say Shakespeare was the most Greek of all modern poets, and that his verse was the most harmonious.

Judgments of Sainte-Beuve usually receive Arnold's imprimatur. But at times he does attempt to prove his independence of judgment. His solution of Gray's comparative failure to produce is accounted for by saying that he fell on an age of prose—not the explanation of Sainte-Beuve. And he feels that Sainte-Beuve's statement that Eugénie de Guérin was as great a genius as her brother needs explanation, in spite of the fact that 'no one has a more profound respect for M. Sainte-Beuve's critical judgments than he.'

With Sainte-Beuve came his interest in the Guérins. Professor Saintsbury has lamented the fact that he should have wasted his energies over such second-rate people; but in some respects it is an advantage, for how many second-rate critics there are who can hand down the tradition concerning first-rate writers! But in this respect Matthew Arnold so far fell from his ideal of guiding English literature into the main channel of Continental thought, that he lapsed into that distinctively English trait of following side issues and fighting for lost causes.

Passing by the Guérins as more significant for the religious aspect of the French, we may take up another of Sainte-Beuve's discoveries. Without retailing the essay on Joubert, we find there a clear instance of Arnold's disparagement of English literature, from the way in which Coleridge is

handled. He is allowed to have the superficial resemblance to Joubert of being a great talker, and the essential resemblance of being a seeker not only after the truth, but for an organ or means of attaining it. Coleridge's writings dissatisfy us; very little of his poetry or philosophy or criticism is expected to stand. De Remusat's opinion that Coleridge's criticisms are impudently absurd is given to show us how the Englishman strikes the foreigner. Joubert, on the other hand, has less smoke and turbulence. He is promptly forgiven his strictures on Milton—whom not even the prose of Racine could remedy. This sage, at whose door King Demos once stood, shows an amazing insight into the meaning of the Catholic Church, whose ravishing beauty made her loved by millions. He receives approbation for his dictum that the Old Testament is the book of the knowledge of Good and Evil, the New Testament the book of Innocence; for his acute analysis of the error of the Jansenists as an erecting of 'Grace' into a fourth member of the Trinity; for his sentence, 'worthy of Geothe', that monstrosities of fiction 'hurt us'; for his love of Plato—in short, for his permanent criticism of literature. Now, whether this appreciation is warranted or not, it seems on the one hand unfair to test Coleridge by the permanence of his criticism; and on the other to gloss over the critical ideas of Joubert; and finally, it is quite possible that Joubert was superior to Coleridge, and yet the conclusion that French literature as a whole is superior to English be inadmissible.

Matthew Arnold had the grace to refrain from drawing the conclusion; he should not have implied it. He admits that Joubert will be no more famous dead than alive; yet, because he lived in an alien age, when the Philistine was great in the land, and still did not bow the knee to Baal, he is held up for our applause.

Quite so; but is not this a frank desertion of the belief in the inherent superiority of the main current of literature? He has put Joubert with the immortal minority; he has not been faithful to his theory, but has, unconsciously enough, adopted the true attitude. Take his canon: to test a given specimen of literature by the classics. The classics of any literature have, presumably, shown a greater degree of life than the rest; but the question is whether the whole literature will live and influence future writers. And with patriotic insistence we may demand of Matthew Arnold how he knows that the English classics have less vitality in them than the French. He himself has shown an affinity for French writers that are out of the main stream—how could he have explained that?

Follow the line of French poets he has drawn up for us: Molière, the Giant, with Goethe and Wordsworth, one of the greatest figures in modern poetry—followed by Racine, Boileau, Voltaire, André, Chenier, Beranger, Lamartine, de Musset, Victor Hugo.[1] It is an orthodox enough pantheon, but he can blaspheme them, notably Hugo.

That the English do not appreciate Racine is due to the fact that his power lies in his language,

[1] IV. 97.

something a foreigner will find hard to estimate—tantamount to an admission that his ideas were not remarkable. Joubert's refusing to have a complete set of Voltaire—'the French Luther'—just as he refused to have a full set of Rousseau; his finding quite a difference between idolising Luther and Mahomet and idolising Rousseau and Voltaire; as well as the mention of Gray's having begged his young friend Nicolls, who was planning a trip to France, not to visit Voltaire, as it would be an act of homage,—all this goes to show that Matthew Arnold was only too well aware at what point the stream of French literature had been polluted.

Again, as an Englishman, he will not dare to controvert Joubert's opinion that neither Racine nor Boileau's poetry flows from the fountain head. Boileau's is 'half-poetry'—a characterisation he parallels for us by saying that it would fit Pope's. Again, Racine is a superior writer, not an inimitable one; his talent is seen in his works, not in the man himself.

Passing to French prose writers, we find them incidentally touched upon. If we wish to learn the true Bossuet we are advised to look for him in the discussion by Joubert, not in Macaulay's declamations. He reproves the English for not appreciating Chateaubriand; it is due simply to ignorance. He quotes his dying words, and calls him a dying lion.[1] But in the Essay, *A French Critic on Goethe*, the absurd French veneration of the youth, who showed that he was only eighteen when he enthusiastically

[1] Essay on *Joubert*.

exclaimed that the Eternal had created Chateaubriand for the guidance of the universe, is held up to a mild ridicule. This change of front, if not of opinion, brings home to us the question, how far these criticisms he is so fond of quoting were really assented to. The deferential yet careful record of what we might call his own or minority reports, where he differs from Sainte-Beuve or Scherer, makes us suspect that in many cases he swallowed the camel while straining at the gnat. For instance, Scherer's criticism of Milton—we will reserve his criticism of Goethe till we discuss Goethe himself—is held up as a brilliant example of what a criticism should be. Macaulay had declaimed about Milton; his famous essay is condemned as a case of really dangerous obscurity, due to a superficial and deceptive clearness. Addison had been conventional and tame even in his exaggerated claims. And Scherer was the first to dissect Milton into the Puritan and the humanist of the Renascence; to discriminate carefully between his tiresome theological disquisitions and his incomparable touches, which have become part of the patrimony of poetry—a clear, historical estimate as far removed from the lip worship of Macaulay and Addison as from the disparagement of Voltaire and the robust remarks of Dr. Johnson. For all this we are not sure what Arnold thought of Milton. How much less certain can we be of his opinions concerning French authors! Yet, that he was capable of writing a history of French literature, if he had had the time—a work that would have wiped out the

reproach of Taine's History—one cannot doubt from the fragments that appear.

Consider the way in which he handles that false prophet, Victor Hugo, half genius, half charlatan, as he calls him. He is a genius as flawed as La Fontaine is perfect—an average sensual man, impassioned and grandiloquent—who can bear comparison only with a groveller like Zola. Behind this we feel there is a sincere conviction. That touch of humour, with which he pictures for us Victor Hugo proclaiming his list of literary sovereigns of the past, and how the audience would spontaneously rise and exclaim: '*And* Victor Hugo!' There is too much relish in the attack to be merely an adopted prejudice.[1]

Amiel, though a Genevan, is classed as a Frenchman. His diary fell into Matthew Arnold's hands late in life; and he could not allow it to supplant Senancour's *Obermann*. The way in which he uses the book shows how predominating the schoolmaster strain could become. He pours vials of mollified wrath on his yearning after the Transcendental; and then apparently hunts the book for literary criticisms; and ends with the wish that such a genius had not been diverted from the fields of literary criticism, which, considering when the essay was written, may refer as much to himself as to Amiel. In fact, it is Scherer's seductive introduction that has led him to read the book; he admits he has no appreciation for the philosophy of the writer, for he himself has no philosophy. It might seem, then, that the criticism

[1] X. 263.

of Amiel's philosophy as 'futile' is impossible. The only apology for the stricture is the one he himself offers: that he was then too old to change and too hardened to hide his views. Apparently it is the cordial veneration for Sainte-Beuve that wins Arnold's approval most: Sainte-Beuve is a man who added 'to an infinitely refined culture a prodigious memory and an incredible multitude of facts and anecdotes.' As a critic, he 'supplied the world with a bias'—shall we add Mr. Arnold and Amiel in particular? No doubt this coincidence with his own high estimation of Sainte-Beuve was gratifying. Then, in regard to Victor Hugo, as a touchstone of Amiel's literary acumen, he finds him saying: 'As a prophet he has been given the lie . . . Humility and common-sense are only fit for Lilliputians (Victor Hugo would say). Victor Hugo superbly ignores everything he has not foreseen. He does not know that pride limits the mind, and that a limitless pride is a littleness of soul . . . A few pricks of Voltaire's irony would have made the inflation of his genius collapse, and rendered him stronger by rendering him saner.'

This quotation reveals the essence of Matthew Arnold's dependence on the French critics; and with that we may take leave of his French guides and acquaintances. Under Scherer and Sainte-Beuve he had really adopted the so-called historical treatment; a given author or work was to be compared with the accepted classics—a mode which would forbid any advance and, in time, would create an irritating narrowness of mind in the critic, while, on the other

hand, making it impossible to judge a literature as a whole. Suppose that La Fontaine, Molière, and Rousseau are the supreme French classics—with whom are we to test them? The Greeks! But is it not impossible simply to compare literature coming from so obviously different environments, unless we first adopt certain canons, obtained by a careful analysis of style and effects? Instead of that, Sainte-Beuve's and Scherer's dicta are imported, much as certain theologians, a generation ago, used to go to Berlin and Tübingen to pick up theological novelties.

* * * *

In 1859 Matthew Arnold was deputed by the Board of Education to examine into and report on the condition of Education in France. He visited the Toulouse Lyceum and a private school at Sorèze, run by Lacordaire, whom he describes as a religious genius. With a pass from Michelet, he saw the inside of several schools in Paris, neglecting not even the pensions for boys, like ' Bonaparte ' and ' Charlemagne,' or even the Jesuit School of Vaugirard.

Without attempting to recount the impressions made on him, or the suggestions he had to offer the English authorities, in detail, we might say that the burden of his report was the superiority and cheapness of the State-controlled system of France.

The fact which seemed to be most striking was the cheapness of the education, a fourth or a fifth of the cost of a similar education in England, although there were pensions in Paris that approached—feebly

enough—Eton and Harrow in expense. To the objection that, after all, Toulouse and Sorèze are not Eton and Harrow, he cheerfully acquiesced; but drove home the point that they were to be compared with those in England, the cheaper secondary schools, to which the middle class had to send their sons.

He then went on to show how it was, by an elaborate system of State supervision, well checked by higher authorities, that such a state of affairs was made possible. Even if private schools existed, they were not freed entirely from State supervision; they were not allowed to employ teachers who had not satisfied State requirements, for instance. And that with really up-to-date public schools the private enterprises had to meet a stiff competition, both in expense and excellence—a boon to the middle class with whom he was so fond of identifying himself. It was true that the aristocrat would not favour making education common and unclean; but the aristocrat's inconsistency in admiring France and refusing to follow her lead in regard to social equality was only too well known.

And in some respects these schools would compare favourably with the best in England. The picture of Lacordaire's kindness to his pupils, and the story of the young boy kissing his hand passionately, are certainly not to be paralleled in England; headmasters do not usually receive such marks of affection. Then the meals in a French school were served with some regard to the social instincts, whereas in

England, though the individual was filled, the public were sent away empty. Moreover, in the instruction of their own language and literature, the French had properly emphasized a side of education neglected in England—one of the causes of writers without good literary background and of unappreciative readers. That the French had given up corporal punishment was held up as an example; for the custom was 'half ridiculous, half disgusting.'[1]

On the whole, State education in France was a brilliant success; and he was not horrified by the vision of so many objectors to the system, namely, the vision of the French Minister of Education pulling out his watch and being able to say whether every boy in France was at that moment reciting French grammar or not.[2]

* * * *

This leads to the problem of the political situation in France. After the early sympathy with the French Revolution, such as that of Wordsworth, the common opinion in England had been that it was a failure. Matthew Arnold does not give us an elaborate apology for the Revolution, but it is not hard to see where his sympathies lay; he had too great a belief in the spread of democracy to hide his feelings about it. 'France's democracy,' he says, 'has a certain grandeur.' France is the 'lode-star' of democracy. The common people of France are 'its soundest part.'[3] He quotes Lavelaye, a Belgian economist, as

[1] XII., A French Eton, 238. [2] X. 174. [3] X. 12.

tracing the prosperity of the French peasant to the system of bequest—division of the property among the children, instead of giving some an enormaus handicap in life. But there was a reverse to this bright picture; and in time Matthew Arnold came to see it. The events of 1870 must have been a shock to him, after he had held France up as an example to the English. He had to admit that the French were less solid than the Germans. Although he is willing to accept Sainte-Beuve's reservation to Napoleon's remark that charlatanism had pervaded everything, namely, that French literature had escaped; yet he feels that the French had been properly judged out of the mouth of one of their own great men. France had been organised on charlatan principles, that is, half-truths. And Michelet's statement that the people of France were a 'nation of barbarians civilised by conscription,'[1] which once seemed to him to prove the value of militarism, no doubt later would become the explanation of why their civilisation had fallen. M. Nisard's remark on the English being admirable for their capacity for going through with what was disagreeable, might well be converted to mean that it was a trait lacking to the French.[2]

* * * *

The religion of the French, Matthew Arnold had presented to us as exemplified by the charm of Fenelon's mysticism, in the idyllic picture of the community at La Chenaie, with the picturesque figure of M. de Lammenais at its head—a view of French

[1] VI. 49. [2] IV. 98, Essay on Tolstoi.

life the average, youthful Englishman does not associate with the name 'French.' Joubert, with his pleas for the pomp and publicity of their religion, with his puerile treatment of the Jansenists, is seen through a mist of admiration.

Pass, then, across the twenty years' sojourn in the wilderness of theological thought, into which Matthew Arnold had strayed, and listen to him in the discourses in America, on *Numbers* and the *Remnant*. It is the confession of a betrayed judgment. 'To France,' he says, 'I have always found myself powerfully drawn. People in England often accuse me of liking France and things French too well.' He then quotes the saying of Sainte-Beuve about how he has passed into French literature, by being honored through French imitators. In spite of which, when looking at the popular literature of the French at the time—novels, plays, papers—he parodies the query of the town clerk of Ephesus: 'What man is there that knoweth not that the city of the French is a worshipper of the great Goddess, Lubricity?'—or to use the euphemistic Greek of the New Testament, Aselgeia. Which, when coupled with the remark at the end of the volume[1] that France is suffering from a dangerous disease, shows that he sees only too clearly the seat of France's trouble. Blowitz, in *The Times*, offers the grand old remedy—colonies! To which Arnold sarcastically remarks that the explanation offered by the Eternal may possibly be as near the mark as the one suggested by that journalist.

[1] IV. 311.

It is in this spirit that he offers up his prayers for France: 'France, again, how often and impetuously for her the prayer has gone up to heaven—"Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee!"'[1] Or, as he suggests to the French reporter, who has criticized the English religious spirit, after visiting a Moody and Sankey revival meeting,—a little more Biblism would not hurt France.[2]

His *Culture* and *Anarchy* were written on the text from Renan: who hoped that 'general intelligence' might spread, which in essence was 'attention to the reason of things.' It was thus that he hoped to free England from the danger of 'intellectual mediocrity, vulgarity of manners, superficial spirit, lack of general intelligence,' such as possessed the Americans. It is the same Renan, whom he hails as the superior of the hard working but rather heavy Germans, such as Keim and Ewald, who cannot endure his easy success, whom he now holds up to the Americans as having lapsed far enough from the faith of sweetness and light to suggest, that 'Perhaps, after all, the gay people have the right.'

He tended to explain this change of attitude as due to the slackening of moral tension on the part of the French; we might prefer to find that, with the passing of the years, his own moral tension became tightened, just as his insight into such matters became clearer. At last, he must have realized that the unpleasant and uninspiring note struck by the literature of France in the latter part of his life was not an isolated

[1] Literature and Dogma, VII. 358. [2] X. 75.

phenomenon; France, he came to realize, was a broken reed, and he refused to lean on it. The slight tinge of bitterness towards France—it is hardly possible to deny it—must have been due to the fact that he saw that by her downfall how many of his prophecies had been discredited. So much the more credit, that late in life he decided to change his course. Verdi, in his eighties, attempting a Wagnerian opera, is no greater example of openness of mind than this acknowledgement that his admiration had been misplaced.

'The English'—so Monsieur Nisard had said—'are able to put constraint on themselves and go through with what is disagreeable.'

Matthew Arnold was an Englishman. . .

III.—Germany—The Triumph of System.

We pass now to Germany and things German.

In this case it is not so much the enthusiastic champion as the impassive observer; it is no longer one who has entered a foreign Literature by an inner line, but the critical foreigner. It is not the charm and the spirit of German life, but the spectacle of a nation in its rebirth. The French, he tells us, are remarkable for their mental agility and their love for ideas as such, the Germans for their fidelity to ideas; the former's speculation becomes a means of amusement; the latter are, in truth, doctrinaire, and try to realize the ideals their thinkers and poets have set before them.

From this we are justified in reversing the order of treatment; German life—in the state, school, church —and not German literature is the dominating interest.

* * * *

Nine years after his visit to France to examine the school system, Matthew Arnold went to Prussia on the same errand. What struck him at once was the great difference between French and German education; in Germany the Renascence had influenced education far more than in France or Italy; for in these countries it had not gained control of the schools. As over against England, the other great country where the Reformation had triumphed, North Germany alone had truly blended the Reformation and the Renascence. At first, in this alliance the dominating power had belonged to the Church: as a result the spirit of the schools had flagged. Even as late as Wolf, the Homeric critic, the cry had been: 'The schools will never be better as long as the schoolmasters are theologians by profession. A theological course at the university, with its smattering of classics, is about as good a preparation for a classical master as a course of feudal law would be.'[1]

Times had changed: under Wilhelm von Humboldt, with the aid of Schleiermacher, the Prussian machinery had been thoroughly overhauled. The former, he tells a writer in the *Westminster Gazette*, who had unearthed a statement of Humboldt's to the effect that the State should only control what directly

[1] XII. 289 ff.

relates to the security of person and property—a view, we might add, held also by Schleiermacher,—that the former had, in spite of this theory, helped the State to a control over education. Humboldt is 'one of the most beautiful souls that ever existed'; he prided himself on the foreign influences that widened his character; and his motto—rather verbose—that it is 'one's business in life to perfect oneself and create around him as numerous an aristocracy of talents and character as possible[1]' might be taken as a keynote of the ideal of Prussian education.

It is impossible to follow the account he gives of the Prussian schools. Their thoroughness astounded him; the facility of the pupil at the gymnasium in Latin would have surprised even the masters at Harrow or Eton, the only consolation being the English schoolboys' Latin verse. But there were defects he did not hesitate to point out; the religious instruction in the higher classes was 'futile'; and, in general, the Prussian schoolmaster was dogmatic.[2] But the outstanding glory of the German system was its removal of politics—electioneering for a position—from the schools. The Teuton, with his distaste for an omnipotent executive had carefully watched that point; even a lower master could not be dismissed without having recourse to a referee.[3]

But the great proof of the value of their system was the widespread general intelligence. He had found workmen who read Macaulay's History of England;

[1] VI. 117, Barb. and Phil. [2] XIII. 355-358. [3] XII. 339.

and we must admire him for overcoming the temptation of twitting him on his choice.[1] Another significant fact was that the Prussians preferred their public schools to the private ones. While, on the other hand, the crown patronage schools were not for a class apart, but served as models, paid for by the King of Prussia out of his own pocket,—a royal object lesson, 'higher that the suggestions of an ordinary man's ordinary self.'[2] And, in his opinion, a sovereign, guided by Humboldt and his companions, was a slightly superior judge of education to the British Philistine, in the form of the societies of Commercial Travellers or Licensed Victuallers. This government control was not a grasping central power; it allowed for local interests; but 'education was not left to the chapter of accidents.'[3] The gravamen of the commonplace charge, that the Prussian system was soulless, he refutes by saying that really to the German student 'Das Zweck des Lebens ist das Leben selbst'—which, being interpreted, means that the German educates himself for life, not to pass an examination.[4] That, in fact, the German is trying to meet the ideal which Bismarck enunciated when he said: 'A man who exercises an important public function in dealing with other men's minds, should exercise it with the light, help, discipline of the best culture which a nation has to give.'[5]

Or as Thunder-ten-Tronch—the imaginary Rabshakeh of our prophet—had put it: 'We North-Germans have worked for "Geist" in our way, by

[1] XII. 326. [2] 313. [3] 302 ff. [4] 383. [5] 95.

loving knowledge, by having the best educated middle and lower classes in the world.'[1] This North German is the true type of his countrymen. He is scientific—in the true meaning of the word, a sense alien to the English mind.[2] And yet he has unpleasant qualities; like all North-Germans, he is a gross feeder,[3] and has their habit of turning up his nose at things and laying down the law about them.[4] It is by reservations of this nature that he can retain his preference for France. Even Arminius is made to admit that France has had her baptism of fire; and those that are thus baptized 'Geist' must care for.[5] And while Germany was fused into a nation by her common possession of ideas, France was by the fire of 1789. This praise for the German idealism allows little room for Germany's political leaders. Neither that 'preaching old drill-sergeant'[6] the King of Prussia, nor Bismarck, who would have muzzled the Philistines, instead of developing them, are true exponents of 'Geist'; for the supremacy of the Teuton came not by might, nor by power, but by 'Geist.' Or, as Arminius' dying words—during the seige of Paris—have it: 'God bless Germany—and confound her Kings and Princelings!'[7]

It is not to be wondered at, then, that the Prussian State, as the embodiment of ideas, is held up to England as a model. The vexing problem of the establishment of the Church is offered a happy solution; don't disestablish Episcopacy, but establish another

[1] VI. 249. [2] 254. [3] 332. [4] 243. [5] 256. [6] 311. [7] 340 ff.

Church, Presbyterian, to which, Arnold believes, the great bulk of the Nonconformists would resort.[1] The still more pressing problem of the Irish Church could easily be settled on the lines, on which Protestant Prussia has dealt with her Roman Catholic subjects. Moreover, in Prussia as in France, Church funds are in the hands of a public, responsible government, and not, as in England, in the hands of a private, irresponsible government.[2] Nevertheless, it is an open question whether or not he admitted the truth of the opinion, generally held in England, that the Prussians were tainted with irreligion.[3]

The German success in 1870 is not dealt with at large, and for a very obvious reason. He contents himself with dissecting the *Daily Telegraph's* warning to the Prussian Government to give the people liberty.[4] How about the French, who asserted their liberty so fiercely? he asks. It is really Mr. Arnold who should have dealt with the question: the education in both countries was nearly ideal; would he then have attributed the downfall of France to their political constitution? He was too much a democrat to do that. The only field was that of morals, which, however, was three-fourths of life. He does not tend to minimise matters, but fails to relate this to the new tendency in the religion of France, which is certainly not that of Joubert, hardly that of Fenelon, but practically that of M. Renan. His failure to deal with the great developments of German

[1] Preface to *Culture and Anarchy*, xxxvii. [2] VI. 377 f.
[3] 262. [4] 235.

religious thought is, therefore, very significant; but perhaps he was even then too old to change, for a change would have entailed a complete reversal of his own theological views.

It is, then, from this picture of Prussian greatness, which many have since then painted in more or less lurid fashion, that we turn to consider Germany's gift to the world literature. There is less of the personal interest to vitiate Matthew Arnold's criticism of it in its reality.

* * * *

German philosophy—in spite of Mr. Frederick Harrison's reproaches on Arnold for having none of his own—is disclaimed. Recalling his strictures on Amiel's extravagances, it is not hard to see the ironic smile which his face wore, as, in a letter in the Arminius series, he says he was doing nothing much except studying German philosophy.[1] Hegel's *Phänomenologie* is singled out as the supreme specimen of its class.[2] There is a little more sympathy for Kant; at the trial of Diggs, which he and Arminius attend, he thinks that the time has come for applying the categorical imperative, when there exist children of this lower, peasant class—children from whose faces every gleam of life is effaced.[3]

This supercilious treatment of the German philosophy is unfortunate, for, whatever the merits of the systems in question, it is no doubt here that the key to German literature and German religious life is to

[1] VI. 282. [2] 300. [3] 286.

be found. It comes with a disconcerting, if not entirely unexpected effect, to find him saying that Heine represents the main stream of German literature since Goethe. That picture he has given us in his essay on him—the humorist who saw in Paris the New Jerusalem, that messenger of the French Revolution who brought its lessons home to the Germans —has many sparkling touches, but it hardly proves his main contention; in fact, it seems as if the Great Humorist has used Heine's career as a means to delude Matthew Arnold as well as to mock the unfortunate paralytic himself. Apparently his regard for Heine had increased; for in 1848 he wrote to his mother that Heine attempted the Byronic cynicism and gloom without having the necessary experience of life. The older view was that contained in his poem on Heine's grave; Heine—

> . . . who, Goethe said,
> Had every other gift but love.

It is strange to find him commenting, in a letter on his lecture on Heine, that the latter's wit had moved even a wooden Oxford audience to an outburst of laughter. Heine, however, stands for the true Hellenic spirit; even as a boy, his refusal to translate *Glauben* as anything but *le credit*, and his consequent antipathy to the very word 'religion,' show his tendency. As a Hellenic soul he is contrasted with F. W. Robertson, and is bound to outlive the latter, because the Greek soul will more and more displace the Hebrew. For once we descend to a

clear definition of this Greek soul; Matthew Arnold thinks that no better expression of the Hellenic mind can be found than those words of the French moralist: '*C'est le bonheur des hommes, quand ils pensent juste.*'[1]

German literature meant for Arnold one, supreme and beloved, name—Goethe—who 'saw life steadily and saw it whole.'

He admits, to be sure, that Herder and Lessing have a unique place in German minds; that they will always awaken a reverence and enthusiasm among the Germans 'such as the most gifted masters will hardly awaken.' It is because they have humanised knowledge. And in another passage he gives a list of poets, parallel to that for France: Klopstock, Lessing, Schiller, Uhland, Rückert, Heine; and promulgates the truly strange doctrine that bulk will win a poet a place. And even Christian of Troy and Wolfram of Eschenbach are touched on—fascinators of their generation, as Chaucer was of his. But, after all, these men were acquaintances of the schoolmaster; the voice that spoke to him as a critic of life and manners was Goethe.

In M. Scherer's criticism of Goethe we see Matthew Arnold's own warm admiration only partially expressed. It is true that Arnold did not have the exaggerated Teutonic estimate of Goethe which the earlier English worshipper of Goethe had; he had not yet come to the point of betraying the English tongue or the English genius, either. Much less did

[1] VI. 122 f., Heb. and Hel.

he endorse the pronouncement of Professor Hermann Grimm, who, in order to satisfy the German desire, after 1870, to have a poet to match their new empire, modestly suggested that *Faust* was the 'greatest work of the greatest poet of all time.' But he puts aside the contemporary judgments on Goethe; even Tieck considered Byron a greater poet. Goethe's own attitude to Byron, as the 'genius of the century'—even if we accept Arnold's amendment of 'genius' to 'talent'—is significant; nor does it relieve the situation to record Goethe's exception to Byron, that 'he becomes a child when he reflects.' We cannot escape the fact that the very tone of the adulation of Arnold's earlier years was only a re-echo of the adulation of Goethe's age for Byron, and of nearly equal value.

We cannot be expected to accept even such mild praise as Arnold's—that Goethe was 'the greatest voice of the century'; that Goethe was 'the greatest modern man.'

The proof offered is insufficient. Goethe is held to be pre-eminent 'in the width, depth, richness of his criticism of life.' In his essay on Emerson, Arnold gives this judgment concrete form: 'the large, liberal view of life in *Wilhelm Meister*, how novel it was to the Englishman in those days!'—days when Carlyle had brought his message to them—'salutary, too, and educative for him, doubtless, as well as novel.' It was *Wilhelm Meister*, then, not *Faust*, that bore the message of the voice. It was a message of culture and cosmopolitanism rather than of passionate

morality,—Wilhelm Meister, who became, it has been said, the ideal of the Romantic School, their programme being to realize and put into practice that ideal. How, then, Goethe can be considered 'the greatest and wisest influence' in our century is past finding out; it may be in his criticism of literature and his instincts for form, his aesthetic speculations—if it is possible to divorce literature from life in this fashion—that Goethe is excellent. But it is, as we shall see, precisely here that Matthew Arnold wavers in his allegiance. He claims that Wordsworth has produced the purest and most poetic work of the century, and George Sand the most varied and attractive; that for fineness of soul and mystical insight the one predominates, for mere brilliancy of form the other—and that Goethe is supreme in content, in philosophy.

But that the ironical old man of Weimar, as a modern German novelist has called him, with his oracular and silent contempt for Christianity, should be called the wisest influence in German literature makes us pause; not that we would, or could, shake him from the pedestal he occupies by theological prejudice, but simply to ask whether a man who ignored half the tendency of civilization, the movement of Hebraism, if you will—a movement that represents, after all, the life of the spirit to thousands—whether such a man could be called fitly the wisest influence in the nineteenth century, or even the Bismarck of German literature, if we may dare the expression. Is not the serene contempt of many

a later writer for the grand obverse of life really an outcome of that naturalistic revolt, which Goethe upheld, if he did not originate it? Is not the offspring of that spirit to be found in those very realistic French novels, plays, and newspapers, very like their English congeners, which, to use a phrase of Arnold's, shoot garbage in the face of the public?

If Matthew Arnold stood where we do, possibly he would have examined his verdict on Goethe with care. It is true that Goethe himself was free from many of these defects; but then he entered into that vast heritage of German thought which came to his age—which had more than a tinge of Hebraism in it. And a man's influence is not usually a propagation of his whole individuality, but of its most pronounced and novel characteristics.

Then Matthew Arnold had two foibles—a passion for collecting epigrams and a custom of using literary criticism as a touchstone to a writer's power. But it is dangerous to base greatness on these gifts, for they are usually to be found in an age of the Epigoni. The epigram may convey valuable truth, but it may also cover, with its smartness of speech, a poverty of thought, while literary criticisms are really marks of dogmatism—sometimes the substitution for the living waters of those tepid, and even stagnant, cisterns of literary theories.

Thus Goethe's maxim, 'To act is easy, and to think is hard,'—on which Matthew Arnold bases his justification for writing *Culture* and *Anarchy*, in the conclusion to the series—may be very true, but the

amount of thinking required to produce such a maxim is, in Lord Chesterfield's chaste phrase, 'd——d easy.' Similar sayings, such as, 'A man thinks to show himself my equal by being rude (*grob*); he does not show himself my equal, but himself as rude,'[1] is, after all, only a case of literary tumbling—a brilliant handspring—nothing more. Then such an analysis of religious sectaries, as those who are possessed of '*eigene, grosse Erfindungen*,'[2] seems to show no subtler power of expression than is common to all users of the German tongue.

Goethe's literary criticisms are commended to an obedient and humble British public. His slight error in regard to Byron is explained away by re-translation, without dealing with the question whether Byron had the greatest 'talent' of the century. Still it is hardly fair to press the point; there are no ecumenical councils to define the literary dogmas. However, Goethe's generous treatment of Milton, when there was so much to 'repel' him in the austere Puritan, can hardly satisfy our curiosity as to how Matthew Arnold would have justified the statement that, 'Nothing has ever been done so entirely in the sense of the Greeks' as Samson Agonistes; and wherein he detected the literary acumen of such a dictum as 'Milton is in very truth a poet, whom we must treat with all reverence.' Like M. Edmond Scherer, Goethe can apportion his praise and blame; but surely it is the correctness of the judgment that is at point. But even granting it (for it is said to be

[1] X. 66. [2] VI. xx.

admitted by Scherer; and Scherer, we hear, much to our astonishment and pleasure, has the same literary instincts as the plain Englishman, namely, 'the same instinctive sense rebelling against what is verbose, ponderous, roundabout, inane—in a word, *niais* or silly,' in German literature[1]), we still have a right to ask whether Goethe, with all his fine balance in literary judgment, had also a just appreciation of the great antithesis of life.

That is a question Goethe's own work must answer.

As early as Carlyle, we have been taught that Goethe represented two streams of literature, the one in *Götz* and the other in *Werther*. Feudalism and romance, passion and emotion, represent the two phases of his interests and character. He is thus a cross between Scott and Byron, if we follow Matthew Arnold's conclusion. Omitting the customary remarks on mongrels, we at once see that these two notes will appeal varyingly to different critics. Even the calm, if somewhat censorious Scherer is a little too hard on *Götz*. And his rating of *Tasso* and *Iphigenia*, at the very apogèe of Goethe's art, when he was under the inspiring influence of Rome—the classical, not the medieval Rome—Rome, after leaving which he never had a happy day—even in this, which might seem to us to be the crux of the question, whether Scherer's view is correct, Matthew Arnold parts company; it is too high a place for those works. Even *Faust*—the first part, 'the only one that counts'

[1] X. 267.

—cannot be classed with *Lear*, or *Agamemnon*, in spite of its having no false tones or weak lines in it. This leaves us a bit puzzled as to where we are. But when we find that Scherer's statement that it is 'the poem of modern life,' and 'perhaps the most wonderful work of poetry in our century,' is gladly acquiesced in, when we find the tentative suggestion that the 'perhaps' be erased, we can no longer be in doubt.

But the tide of criticism turns; it is the true function of the critic, as of the prophet, to root up and destroy as well as to build and to plant. For the Goethe-götzen-dienst he has disquieting news. M. Scherer can, in spite of his French or Attic urbanity of style, say very rude things. Upon Goethe's return to Weimar, where the Christiana Vulpus affair loomed a little too high on the horizon, the man of inspiration froze. *Hermann and Dorothea*—of the editions *de luxe*, for wedding presents—is a factitious work: innkeepers and apothecaries of the *dorf* speak like Ulysses and Nestor, and plough horses become the coursers of a Greek poem—which seems to admit that Hellenism, if unalloyed, will sometimes pall—which is, also, a pedantic objection, if we only consider the probable originals of Ulysses, Nestor, and the said coursers. But, possibly, this is that false Hellenism, due to Winckelmann's false conception of Greek life, where all the figures were 'grave, solemn, sculptural,'[1] to use Scherer's words.

But to quote M. de Saint-Victor's comment on

[1] X. 288.

Wilhelm Meister, that when Goethe goes in for being tiresome, he succeeds with astonishing perfection, must have sounded very like blasphemy to the ardent admirers of Goethe. But even Niebuhr—whom some people might suspect of not having the right to cast the first stone—is brought up to corroborate: *Wilhelm Meister*, he says, is a menagerie of tame animals. This, however, does not seem to be what Arnold thinks that the Americans should think about the book. Among the great voices which his world had heard—Newman, Carlyle, Goethe, Emerson—Goethe's had been heard, strange to say, most happily in this very book. In it Goethe was 'not the stiff, and hindered, and frigid, and factitious Goethe, who speaks to us too often from those sixty volumes of his, but the great Goethe and the true one.'[1] The youth's lament over Mignon had stirred Carlyle to his purest and most beautiful of renderings.

This great Goethe is such, not because he is a poet. Scherer's belief that he has retouched his lyrics till the life and warmth has left them is not accepted; *Faust* is the greatest work of the century; but, in spite of all that, Goethe's power does not lie in the poetical gift he possessed. 'It is by no means as the greatest of poets that Goethe deserves the pride and prize of his German countrymen. It is as the clearest, the largest, the most helpful thinker of modern times. . . (He) is the greatest poet of modern times, not because he is one of the half dozen human beings who in the history of our race have

[1] IV. 352.

shown the most significant gift for poetry, but because, having a considerable gift for poetry, he was at the same time, in the width, depth, richness of his criticism of life, by far our greatest modern man '—'a master critic.' 'We can imagine, indeed, that great and supreme critic reading Professor Grimm's laudation of his poetical work with uplifted eyebrows and M. Scherer's criticisms '—'frigid and censorious' though they are—'with acquiescence.' In fact we can go further. We can imagine the look of irritated perplexity on the face of Goethe, when he found what he really was, according to Matthew Arnold,—that it was as a critic he was to find his proper position in the ever changing literary pantheon. He might have accepted, with supercilious equanimity, the statement that his servility, seen in his attitude to poor Ludwig of Bavaria, was a mark of his German corporalism; but in the Teuton's mind a supreme place is not to be obtained by being a critic, whether of letters or life, only by being original and only by living; nor would he have been proud of the Hellenic veneer attributed to him, for to him these qualities were the genuine qualities of the German soul. And, yet, it is this very 'ächt deutsch' element that Matthew Arnold does not seem to care for.

IV.—The Italians.

Matthew Arnold's relations with Italy were less intimate than those with France; and his interest in it was less keen than his interest in Prussia.

He wrote to Mrs. Forster in 1859 that he was sorry

for the Italians; but thought that they would do well to wait, rather than to defeat their hopes by being precipitate. His reserve of opinion was a matter of principle; possibly the developments in France made him chary of predictions. For discussing the astonishing veer in the press opinion, after the success of the Italians in the war of liberation, he says that an Englishman discussing foreign politics and advising a nation like Italy is very much like the young man from the country, addressing the nursemaid, after the perambulator is upset.[1]

It is to be regretted, then, that a man who had been Lord Landowne's private secretary, with hopes centred in the Foreign Office, did not follow his own advice.

In *England and the Italian Question* (1859)—unfortunately out of print—his thesis is the dazzling paradox: the attitude of the English aristocracy towards Italy has been justified, but every reason for their attitude was false. The Englishman's belief that since the Fall of the Roman Empire, the Italians had always been a subject people is false; the unnatural condition of the Italians since Charles VIII should not blind us to their practical autonomy from 1310 to 1494. Further, the plea that Lombardy and Venetia were Austrian was as absurd as that other English prejudice against Louis Napoleon, who was *not* waging a war of conquest.

These assertions are interesting, but not convincing. And Matthew Arnold's 'tip' to Napoleon not

[1] VI. 363 f.

to bid so much for ecclesiastical patronage is almost as ludicrous as his advice to the Germans to ' create a Germany which may be able to meet France upon another field of Leipsic without the help of a quarter of a million Russians, which may fight a Ligny that the English have not to redeem by their Waterloo ' . .

The young gentleman from the country who prophesies which way the baby will fall is no more dignified than the one who says, ' I told you so.'

* * * *

His attitude to Italian education reveals a discretion this blunder taught him. The state of education there is too much like that in England. When Cardinal Antonelli asked him what he thought of the schools in Rome, he said, ' that for the first time he was reminded of England.' While in Austria the right of the State to educate its citizens was sacrificed in the name of loyalty, and in England sacrificed in the name of liberty, in Italy it was sacrificed in the name of religion.[1] On the other hand, he was not at all in sympathy with the attitude taken by the liberal Italians. Senor Bonghi's speech against the excision of theology from the university curriculum is commended;[2] such separation would tend to cut the clergy more and more off from the general life and thought of the nation. The ideal is much more likely to be attained by the German policy, nor ought Germany to be treated as a warning to other nations; for the Germans were not trying to substitute enlightenment for religion, but were merely

[1] XII. 403 f. [2] XII. 127, 132.

responding to the popular appeal for a national religion, and saw that the education of the clergy on proper lines was the great means for attaining that end. Whereas the Italians 'imitate the French too much'—not needing as we, the English, do, to attend to that country.[1]

'What the educated Italians need is to be less indifferent to religion, and to know that it is a matter which concerns themselves, also not the clergy only.' For this reason M. de Molinari's statement: 'The Church is free, the State is free,' had been condemned for implying the fallacy that the clergy constitute the Church. It is very much the attitude of Professor Gubernatis, 'perhaps the most accomplished man in Italy'—the attitude he revealed in regard to Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*—that the Bible was an inspired work for the priests, an obscure book to infidels, a historical document for scholars, and a collection of Oriental eloquence for the general reader, 'but that it never has been and never will be a fruitful inspirer of men's daily life.'[2] He had commended a little more Biblism to the French for the good of their souls; he would probably have also advised the Italians to read these collections of eloquence, for the advancement of their learning.

* * * *

Italian literature had its fascination for him, though he was apparently less at home in it than in that of France. It is almost considered as an off-shoot of Old French. He shows that just as old English

[1] Letter to his Mother, May 24, '65. [2] IX. 176 f.

poetry is descended from the old French, so Italian drew its origin from the same soil. In the one case it was the *langue d'oil*, in the other the *langue d'oc*. As the *Chanson de Roland* had stirred English literature to life, so the French had taught Petrarch and Dante to strike the 'true and grand note.'[1] Thus a distant link was forged between the two countries. And Chaucer's dependence on the Italian for words, rhymes, metre showed that English literature had not always been provincial.

Like the lists of French and German poets, he gives one also for Italy: Filicaia, Alfieri, Manzoni, Leopardi.[2] They are not fully discussed. Dante, to be sure, is held up for Mr. F. W. Newman's instruction and enlightenment, as an example of how to write in the 'grand style.' Again, we read that 'incomparable line and a half . . . Ugolino's tremendous words'—

> I wailed not, so of stone I grew.
> They wailed . . .

And the 'lovely' words of Beatrice to Virgil—

> Of such sort hath God, thanked be his mercy, made me,
> That your misery touched me not
> Neither doth the flame of his fire touch me.

The simple but perfect line—

> In his will is our peace.
> *In la sua volontade è nostra pace.*[3]

This last can be used as a magic exorcism, when under the charm of some lesser poet; for instance,

[1] IV. 17 ff. [2] IV. 77. [3] 14.

after being entranced by reading Chaucer, and captivated by some particular line, pronounce, slowly and with gusto—

In la sua volontade è nostra pace.

and you will find yourself released; such lesser poets will be revealed in their true character.

In *Fraser's Magazine* (1863) he warns us against the two extremes in the interpretation of the Divine Comedy. Beatrice is neither a personification of theology; nor, on the other hand, is Mr. Martin's attempt to 'arrange' Dante's relations with her for the purpose of finding salacious gossip the correct way to understand the poem. For at twenty-one and twenty-five Beatrice was more than a woman to Dante; and at fifty she was entirely a spirit.

This does not lead us very far; and we may suspect Goethe's attitude to Dante somewhat shook Arnold's faith in the Florentine, although he feels that Dante's view of civilisation, as 'a development of the human faculties,' is worthy to be placed as a corrective by Goethe's: 'as a higher conception of social and political relations, with skill to bear oneself in the world, and to strike when necessary.'[1]

Goethe's lack of appreciation for medieval Rome—another mark of his consummate critical insight!—was noted above. In regard to Dante it appears, when he tells a young Italian that the *Inferno* is abominable, the *Purgatorio* dubious, and the *Para-*

[1] *Macmillan's Magazine*, 1876, Pref. to Fusco's 'Italian Art and Literature before Giotto and Dante.'

diso tiresome.[1] It remains, then, an open question whether Matthew Arnold followed him, or was really convinced that Dante should be classed with Shakespeare; whether his praise of the Florentine was due to personal love or not, partly at least, simply a recitation of the orthodox literary *credo*.

Leopardi is singled out for more attention. He is 'a gifted and stricken young Italian, who in his sense for poetic style is worthy to be named with Dante and Milton.' He is 'the exquisite master of language,' and 'affords Sainte-Beuve support for the remark that we often see the alliance, singular though it may at first sight appear, of the poetical genius with the genius for scholarship and philology.' Having served this useful purpose, he then becomes a parallel and contrast to Byron. Like him, he died young and was physically deformed. He, too, was a man without a country, though not self-expatriated, since Italy was not then a nation. Unlike him, again, his poems only sold by their tens, instead of their tens of thousands. He had, however, a grave fulness of knowledge, an insight into the real bearings of the questions, which as a sceptical poet he raises, a power of seizing the real point, a lucidity'—in short, qualities with which Byron had nothing to compare.[2] As such, it might have seemed that Leopardi might have been the instance to illustrate the truth that, without a national life, great geniuses must be wasted. Instead of that, Arnold traces his failure to his unhealthy pessimism, so that, although

[1] X. 274. [2] IV. 128 ff., 138 f.

with a wider culture than Wordsworth, he cannot hope to rise to a position beside him.

Italian painting at last spread its glamour about Arnold. In a late letter to Mrs. Forster, he tells her that Italy had taken him by surprise. The exterior of the cathedral at Florence seemed to him the most beautiful in the world—an admission that would make even the most ardent admirer of the Renascence hesitate. He says that he has never enjoyed pictures as those in the two galleries there. Andrea del Sarto and Bartolomeo had touched him in particular.[1] It is a frank admission, and serves to show in the one case how much technique impressed Arnold, and in the other how eccentric first impressions can be. It is not fair, however, to treat such confessions as public pronouncements.

The judgments he passed on Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci serve only to prove how little place painting had in his own thought-world. Raphael is the true *euphues;* as such he was saved from the Byronic natural sins of vulgarity and false criticism, and the Byronic aesthetic sins of common and bad workmanship.[2] Leonardo won a warm place for himself in Arnold's heart by his praise of the Greeks. The Greeks, he had said, had a 'symmetry' which was 'the one thing wanting to' himself. And Leonardo was an Italian![3] These remarks allow of as little emphasis as his suggestion to his mother to compare Tennyson's lines on the death of the Prince Consort with Manzoni's *Cinque Maggio* on Napoleon's end,

[1] XV. 56. [2] IV. 132. [3] IV. 346.

if she wished to see what true poetic beauty was;[1] or his using Giacopone di Todi—

> That son of Italy who tried to blow
> Ere Dante came, the trump of sacred song—

for the theme of an early poem. He had, we might say, both early and late felt the superlative charm of the Renascence in the land of its origin;[2] but he had never been able to devote the time to study the history of that movement, except in the later chapters, when the lead had passed to France and Germany. 'In Italy, as in ancient Greece, the satisfying development of this ideal of the average, sensual man'—the dominating person in France—'is broken by the imperious ideal of art and science disparaging it; in the Germanic nations by the ideal of morality disparaging it.' This seems to shift the burden of the charges laid to the account of the Renascence; but he has already admitted that the 'Italians in the Renascence changed the meaning of *virtù* to a love of fine arts and of intellectual culture.'[3]

It is hard, then, to place faith in many of his conclusions about that great movement, considering that he had not studied it as a whole, nor was able to give an unhesitating verdict.

[1] XIII. 209.

[2] *Letters*, June 5, '65: 'All time spent out of Italy by tourists . . . human life being so short—is time misspent.'

[3] IX. 183.

V.—Conclusion.

We have surveyed the points in which Arnold's attitude to the Continental nations was revealed. It may seem as if his interests were disproportionate to the value of the subjects. But as an artist, he saw life in perspective, not in real proportion—objects near at hand being more striking than those on the horizon. The schoolmaster insisted on comparing the distant glories with those at hand; the schoolmaster used Dante and Homer to instruct Mr. Newman; the schoolmaster evolved, or accepted, a theory of criticism and a theory of poetic composition—and to the schoolmaster in Arnold we owe a debt; it kept him from falling into the pure subjectivism of many so-called critics. But it is the prophet in him that appeals to us. His judgments do not always follow from his principles; but we can forgive that, for he has revealed himself to us; he has shown his bias, and we can allow for it just as much as we choose. He tells us of those currents of thought that perplexed and distressed a generation ago, because he himself had been caught in them. And yet, as a critic, he was in a sense in, but not of, them.

And so of his attitude to the great inrush of Continental thought. He does not discuss it as one might who had been untouched by it. He does not simply diagram the relationships between England and these countries; he illustrates these relationships with experience of his own. It is here his value lies.

Instead of endorsing Mr. Saintsbury's wish that Arnold had devoted his time to literary criticisms, turning out so many each year—we leave Mr. Saintsbury that!—we find in him the mirror, or record, of the spiritual flow of the past generation.

As a critic he did not fall into the fundamental error of divorcing literature from life. It may be seen in the way in which he treats the earlier Victorian literature—could a really permanent art arise among the Philistines? As a critic of English life—he generously admitted the Americans into the circle—his attack was not pure banter; nor was it the serious and high-minded lessons that some have drawn from history for us; the source of his attack was drawn from facts that all men were compelled to see—the gradual decline and fall of French literature, the throttling of Italian life, the triumph of system in the Franco-Prussian war. But it was not his cosmopolitanism that created his dissatisfaction with English life, but rather his dissatisfaction with the surroundings that he found himself in which sent him to observe our neighbours across the Channel. And throughout the fight he carried on, he never failed to retain his interest in affairs at home. He did not become a naturalised Gaul or Teuton, with all the assumed contempt of a renegade for the old civilization. It might seem so; but, if his heart had been opened, we would have found there the one word engraved to be not Italy, as with Browning, nor Germany, as with Carlyle, nor even France, as we might have expected—but England.

His work may not stand in the sense that all his critical decisions in regard to foreign literature should become precedents; but the interest in the life of the Continent, which he stimulated and in part awoke, has already widened and deepened the current of our literary, political, and even religious life. The way to a full consciousness of the English genius is not by an isolated, supercilious self-contemplation, but by a comparison with the spirits that move civilisations akin, and yet different, to our own.

In this his work had two results: he helped to break the admirers of the Continent of their unreasoning applause; he forced many to abandon their insularity.

In this the mark he left on English life will be permanent.

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